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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, school systems isolate pupil personnel staff from the classroom and the learning process. School psychologists, social workers, and counselors work one-to-one with special or problem students who are referred to them by classroom teachers. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina reject this traditional model. Instead, the classroom teacher retains prime responsibility for the education of all students with the help of pupil personnel staff who are called in when needed as consultants. This model is based on several basic concepts. The classroom is the focus of action, not the counselor's office. Students are not merely referred by teachers to pupil personnel services staff. Instead, the teacher becomes, in effect, the client of the counselor. The approach is preventive rather than crisis-oriented. The first approach to dealing with a problem is to adjust the classroom to help the child, rather than removing the child from the classroom. Only when investigation and assessment determine that a child needs a special program, does the child receive special placement. The final factor in effective use of pupil personnel staff is quality control. The pupil personnel services staff must be closely supervised to help them stay abreast of their fields and solve day-to-day problems. (JM)

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Topic: Effective Use of Pupil Personnel Staff--What Difference Does It Make?

Session: Friday, February 17, 9:00 a.m., Room 213

I've been asked to talk to you for about 20 minutes this morning on what difference effective use of pupil personnel staff makes. I'm supposed to know something about the subject, for effective delivery of pupil personnel services has been my responsibility in our school district for the past eighteen years. But in fact, there is no textbook model to follow, - no commonly accepted norm, - no shining example that school people across the country point to and say, "Isn't that a great model. That's what we should be doing." So, what I really will do is tell you about what I think an effective service delivery model is and what difference I think it makes. And, of course, it will bear a close resemblance to what we are trying to make work in our school system. It's what I know best, and I believe in it.

In any system there are constraints that have to do with money, system organization, the people who are there and which of those have power, and the whole constellation of local factors which just are. So you will know the context in which I speak, I need to tell that:

1. Our district is a consolidated city-county system of some 80,000 students in one hundred and seven schools divided into ten areas, each headed by an area superintendent.

2. The basic organization is a line-staff organization with the instructional staff function provided by three central office

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departments, Curriculum, Human Resources and Pupil Personnel Services, all of which are understaffed. However, they have excellent leadership staff in most areas. Each department head is at the assistant superintendent level, equal in rank to the area superintendents.

Historically, the pupil personnel services in our system have gone through several developmental stages. I suspect most of you can identify with one or more of them in thinking of where your system is. They include:

1. Psychologists and others are a part of special education and work only with handicapped pupils.

2. Each discipline staff offers services in total disregard for what the others are doing, all of them operating on a crisis basis. That is, principals refer pupils to them after the school has given up.

3. A loose pupil personnel services organization encourages communication between department heads, but has little effect on how the staff in the field relate to each other or how they deliver services.

4. Centralized multi-discipline clinics to which schools refer students for somebody to cure.

5. Centrally supervised multi-discipline teams offer itinerant service to schools, with principals and staff having little investment in the process.

6. Decentralized multi-discipline teams with principals and staff taking varying degrees of responsibility for process.

All of these models tend to remove responsibility for a child's education from the classroom teacher and place it with the staff. They also do little to develop true team functioning.

7. The seventh model is the one we most closely approximate currently. It keeps the responsibility for the pupil's education with the classroom teacher and it has maximum principal/teacher investment in the functioning of the pupil personnel services, two essentials in an effective service delivery model. It replaces the crisis orientation with a preventive/ developmental orientation.

In our system the Curriculum Department is responsible for development and maintenance of a curriculum that speaks to the needs of students and society. The Human Resources Department provides stimulation for all staff in the form of in-service opportunities, materials development and production, human

relations program including personal counseling, and all media services including instructional television. The Pupil Personnel Services Department's goal is to see that a pupil's individual personal or learning problem or handicap does not impede his/her opportunity for an appropriate education equal to that provided any other pupil. School psychologists, social workers, and counselors are available to teachers in their efforts to better educate pupils and to teachers, pupils and parents as they cope with personal and learning problems. Special Education services and programs are available when students' certifiable handicaps demand supplementary programs or special placement and to help classroom teachers deal with similar but less severe handicaps in pupils. Pupil Assessment services are available for all teachers, principals and central staff as they attempt to assess pupil and program needs and evaluate progress or effectiveness. With the addition of the school health program, which our Health Department provides, the PPS team is complete.

An effective pupil personnel services delivery system is based on two assumptions:

1. The classroom teacher is responsible to parents for the education of the pupils in his/her charge. If learning appears to be impeded, the classroom teacher is responsible for determining the cause by whatever means are available, including the involvement of school system or community resources. If adjustment or correction of approach or program is needed, this is the classroom

teacher's responsibility unless and until an extra-classroom supplement or alternative placement is accomplished.

2. Pupil Personnel Services staff are available to the schools to aid in the education of 100% of the school system's pupils, since disability is a matter of degree. All pupils have learning and behavior difficulties in some area or areas in some degree. At some point these may be of concern to the parent and teacher for the 80% of pupils not certifiable for special education as well as the some 20% who may be certified as eligible for supplementary special education programming or special placement.

The process of connecting Pupil Personnel Services and the classroom is something like this:

1. When a classroom teacher or child's parent becomes concerned about a pupil's learning or behavior difficulties it is the teacher's duty to seek assistance in carrying out his/her responsibility for the education of the pupil.

2. The first level of assistance is consultation. Consultation may be sought from another classroom teacher, a special teacher such as a reading or special education teacher, a

speech/language therapist, psychologist, counselor, social worker or any other school system resource.

3. Specifically, for Pupil Personnel Services, the social worker, counselor, speech/language therapist or psychologist may, upon request of the teacher, conduct such investigations as are necessary to understand the special learning needs of the pupil. This investigation may be an individual or team effort, depending on the nature of the skills required.

4. If the identified special learning needs are within the "normal" range they should be met through adjustment in the classroom. PPS team members may be as involved in designing and implementing the adjustments as is necessary. The important point is that it is a team effort with the teacher in charge.

5. In this last step, the provisions of P.L. 94-142 begin to operate. If it appears that the identified special learning needs may be certifiable and involve supplementary special education programming or special placement, the teacher requests service from the pupil personnel services. At this time the school must seek parental permission for the

psychologist and/or other staff members to evaluate existing data, conduct further investigations and share these findings with the local school committee composed, among others, of the PPS team. The principal takes charge of the process and guides the staff through the processes involved in formal evaluations and/or special placement.

You will note six basic concepts at work: They make the difference.

1. The classroom is the focus of the action, not the counselor's, the psychologist's, or the social worker's cubicle.

2. There is no mention of a referral. The teacher requests service to ask PPS staff help in carrying out his/her responsibility for the pupil's education. The teacher, in effect, is the client of pupil personnel services staff. The parent is the client of the teacher. They become involved with the pupil only to help the teacher understand better how to educate the pupil. The involvement may go as far as direct therapeutic intervention with the pupil.

3. The approach is preventive/developmental in nature rather than crisis oriented. The

teacher seeks PPS help when he/she becomes concerned about a learning or behavior problem. If he/she waits for the crisis stage to develop, the chances are that pupil personnel services staff can do little effective work with the pupil. They are not miracle workers with a bag of tricks.

4. The initial effort is to adjust classroom factors to deal with the pupil's learning or behavior problem rather than making the initial judgment that there is something wrong with the pupil that demands his/her removal from the classroom.

5. All specialists, - psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses, special education and assessment staff, - focus on classroom learning and behavior, - dispelling the limiting sterotypes that:

   a. Psychologists are for testing to determine eligibility for special education.

   b. Social workers make home visits and certify for free lunch.

   c. Counselors counsel one on one in cubicles.

   d. Nurses test sight and hearing.

e. Assessment staff shelves the standardized test inventory.

f. Special educators teach handicapped pupils.

6. When the process gets beyond informal help for the classroom teacher, the principal is in charge of further processes:

a. Formal evaluations and investigations.

b. Certifying special program or placement.

c. Writing of individual educational programs.

d. Involvement of parents.

e. Special placements.

I have talked about service delivery without much reference to service content. I've said that the focus is a preventive/developmental orientation in the regular classroom. Within this frame of reference, the efforts of each Pupil Personnel Services discipline can be and usually are narrowly aimed at their traditional and unique professional function. I like the concepts originated by Dr. Anita Mitchell, the well-known pupil personnel services authority and consultant from California. She suggests that the pupil personnel service content focus is what we have termed the Human Curriculum, the human factors that must underlie achievement in the Academic Curriculum. Dr. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is well known. The concept is applied easily

to the Human Curriculum. Pupils' physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual maturations have profound implications for the quality of their learning and behavior. I hope some enterprising PPS staff will undertake the task of designing a Human Curriculum to accompany the Academic Curriculum, - and thereby define their focus more clearly. We've made two attempts without notable success, but we'll keep trying. What a bigger difference it would make if we could effectively teach our pupils:

1. To appreciate the importance of physical well being.

2. To be emotionally stable and mature.

3. To be socially competent

4. To understand their intellectual potential and how to use it for maximum benefit in learning.

5. To respect themselves and others as human beings and develop a sense of responsibility to self and others.

The final factor in effective use of pupil personnel staff is quality control. And it makes the biggest difference of all. All PPS staff work in very sensitive areas. The way they do their jobs can have serious effects on what happens to pupils in school. Their work influences pupils' decision making, the way their problems are diagnosed and solved or not solved, where they are placed in school, the kinds of programs they are exposed to and how they are treated in them, and they label children as normal or handicapped, frequently setting the course of their entire lives.

The school system that allows less that the highest quality of professional practice is unethical and almost certainly damages children seriously.

Several factors make the maintenance of high quality difficult:

1. Many schools of social work and psychology do not train social workers and psychologists to work in the school setting. There are various levels of training, some of them not competent to function at a completely professional level. They must have added training on the job.

2. Almost always, PPS's various disciplines are trained as though the others do not exist and have no relation to each other on the job.

3. The quality of training programs varies greatly.

4. Highly rated experience in one district may not be valued in another because practice varies so from district to district.

5. The PPS fields change rapidly as research and practice evolve new techniques and knowledge. It is difficult for any practitioner to keep abreast of new developments. Yet failure to

make the best practice available to teachers and pupils is unethical and not in their best interest.

Therefore, it is imperative that each district has top quality leadership for staff in each discipline. Small districts can share leadership. Discipline chiefs must be allowed to supervise the professional performance of the staff in their disciplines. This means having access to the staff in the field for conferences and having the freedom to require appropriate staff development. This close supervision is frequently seen as being suitable only for incompetent staff. The truth of the matter is that competent staff want to stay abreast of their field and check out crucial problems with a supervisor, for they want to be responsible in their work. Incompetent or low level staff frequently resent and resist supervision, for they do not have the vision to see its value. School systems must stand firm in their determination to offer the highest quality service of which they are capable.

I am certain much of this sounds strange to many in the audience, and I can understand that. I'll be pleased to try to react honestly and openly with the panel to try to expand, clarify and explain.

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